

Dingell, Stupak Comment on Latest Developments in FDA Salmonella Investigation

Washington D.C.-Reps. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and Bart Stupak (D-MI), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, responded to an announcement today by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about new developments in the ongoing investigation into the recent Salmonella outbreak.

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Because
of the Salmonella outbreak, since April, 1,251 people in 42 states, the District of Columbia and Canada have been sickened, resulting in 229 hospitalizations. The Salmonella contamination has also contributed to the deaths of two people. FDA initially pinpointed tainted tomatoes as the cause.

On a conference call today, the FDA said that it has confirmed the presence of Salmonella Saintpaul from a jalapeno pepper sample with the same genetic fingerprint that has been linked to the outbreak. The pepper was grown in Mexico by an unnamed grower and was taken during an inspection of a distribution center in

Texas. The FDA also said it does not know where the contamination occurred. FDA stated that the Mexican grower has initiated a recall.

"I'm

glad to hear there has been a potential breakthrough in the investigation into the source of the recent Salmonella outbreak," said Dingell. "However, it is troubling that FDA and CDC have been unable still to pinpoint the exact source of the contamination. The Committee's investigation has uncovered flaws in CDC and FDA's ability to rapidly identify and traceback contaminated food to its source. We must ensure that we are prepared to respond quickly to future outbreaks and potential bioterrorism attacks on our food supply."

"The

FDA now has its first piece of contaminated produce in the Salmonella outbreak but is still unable to tell us how or where this single jalapeno pepper became contaminated," said Stupak. "While today's announcement is a positive development in this investigation that has puzzled investigators for weeks, it also calls greater attention to the obvious weaknesses that exist in our food safety system and the urgent need for reform. It is troubling that it has taken so long to come this far in determining how more than 1,200 Americans became ill and more troubling that so much remains unknown. Our hearing next week will examine what tools the FDA needs to prevent and respond to these outbreaks in the future and restore the confidence of the American people in our food supply."

The Oversight and

Investigations Subcommittee will hold the ninth in a series of hearings on food safety on Thursday, July 31, 2008. The hearing will examine this most recent Salmonella outbreak and the government efforts to traceback the source of contamination.

In April,

Dingell, Stupak and Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Health, released draft legislation entitled the "Food and Drug Administration Globalization Act." The subcommittee has held three legislative hearings on the draft legislation. (For more information visit: <http://energycommerce.house.gov/FDAGlobalAct-08/index.shtml>).

"This

outbreak highlights the need for strong food safety legislation," said Dingell. "FDA needs more resources and additional personnel, including inspectors, to do its job. We need to give FDA the tools to prevent problems before they occur by setting mandatory produce safety standards. FDA must also have the ability to more quickly track the sources of contamination and the authority to remove dangerous products from the market when those in the food supply chain fail to act."

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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